Join GLFSA for a Performance of

LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO

GLFSA is hosting a night at the ballet! You can support GLFSA by purchasing your tickets to this event through the GLFSA website. A block of tickets has been reserved for us on February 18, 2012. Seating is limited; the tickets are available for $38 at: http://www.msu.edu/~glfsa. Click on GLFSA Events.

The original concept of LES BALLETS TROCKADERO DE MONTE CARLO has not changed. It is a Company of professional male dancers performing the full range of the ballet and modern dance repertoire, including classical and original works in faithful renditions of the manners and conceits of those dance styles. The comedy is achieved by incorporating and exaggerating the foibles, accidents, and underlying incongruities of serious dance. The fact that men dance all the parts— heavy bodies delicately balancing on toes as swans, sylphs, water sprites, romantic princesses, angst-ridden Victorian ladies—enhances rather than mocks the spirit of dance as an art form, delighting and amusing the most knowledgeable, as well as novices, in the audiences.

Additional tickets can be purchased directly from the Wharton Box Office: http://whartoncenter.com/boxoffice. We are investigating the possibility of a meet-and-greet with some of the company following the performance. Stay tuned for further information!
As most you will know, the state legislature has passed, and the Governor has signed, what is now known as the Public Employee Domestic Partner Benefit Restriction Act (formerly House Bill 4770, introduced by Rep. Dave Agema (R-Grandville)). The newly-minted title of the Act is apt – it is designed to restrict the ability of public employers to offer anything resembling domestic partner benefits, or any form of spousal benefits to anyone other than a spouse legally married under Michigan law.

However, counter to Rep. Agema’s intentions, the bill was amended by the Senate to remove references to public universities, and in signing it Gov. Snyder stated his interpretation to be that references to “public employer” in the Act excluded public universities and the state Civil Service Commission. Thus, if this interpretation holds, the Act will have no impact on MSU’s policy of Other Eligible Individual (OEI) benefits. President Simon has endorsed that interpretation, and posted a letter on her web-site (http://president.msu.edu/) indicating that OEI benefits will continue unaffected.

This is obviously very mixed news for LGBT faculty and staff at MSU. The good news is that OEI benefits will continue to be available, endorsed by President Simon. In lobbying against the legislation, the MSU VP for Governmental Affairs made a very strong argument about OEI as integral to MSU’s efforts to “attract and retain the highest quality talent” (the text of his letter to legislators is posted on the GLFSA web-site, at https://www.msu.edu/user/glfsa/). The signal this sends of the value that MSU puts on the contribution of all of us is unmistakable, and very welcome.

The less-than-good-news is that Rep. Agema continues to maintain that the language of “public employer” in the Act should cover public universities, and (by implication) that OEI benefits should be rendered unlawful. While his avenues of recourse with this argument are not clear, I won’t be shocked if he (and his supporters) resort to some form of court action, or appeal to the Attorney-General for an opinion that would undermine the Governor’s interpretation. In that event, we may soon be back to fighting to preserve OEI.

The bad news is that this Act was passed by the legislature, and signed by the Governor, at all. Whether it applies to MSU or not, it clearly undermines the ability of municipalities, public school systems, and other public employers to offer any form of domestic partner- or OEI-type benefits. Many of our colleagues and their families will suffer greatly under this Act. Moreover, coupled with the other bills introduced in this session attacking the few protections against sexual orientation and gender identity-based discrimination that do exist in Michigan, this bill is part of a pattern of hostility to LBGT Michiganders that has become painfully evident among some members of the legislature. GLFSA thus welcomes the lawsuit filed by the ACLU of Michigan to challenge the constitutionality of the Public Employee Domestic Partner Benefit Restriction Act. GLFSA has recently joined the Unity Michigan coalition of state-wide groups fighting to protect, preserve and extend antidiscrimination policies, and will work with others on strategies to resist and overcome the anti-LGBT agenda that has become so apparent. OEI benefits are safe for now, but there is a much larger struggle that continues.

Your support is vital if we are to win the battles ahead. GLFSA will continue to keep you updated via our web site at http://www.msu.edu/user/glfsa/.

--Grant Littke
MSU is this year initiating a new Study Abroad program of particular interest to GLFSA members. Entitled Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Sexual Politics in Amsterdam, this program examines the politics of sexual tolerance in the Netherlands, and contemporary challenges in that context.

From the program description (http://osa.isp.msu.edu/Programs/program/index/104667).

Imagine learning about sexual and gender politics and policy in one of the most sexually liberal countries in the world, the first to legalize same-sex marriage and adoption rights for LGBT citizens. Sodomy was decriminalized in the Netherlands as early as 1811. Prostitution is legal, and there are government policies protecting sex workers’ rights. Sex reassignment surgeries are covered by the government health plan. At the same time, “social tolerance” for LGBTQ persons is counterbalanced by a pervasive social intolerance of primarily Muslim immigrants. Students will meet with Dutch scholars at the University of Amsterdam and practitioners working in various agencies to explore the politics of sexual tolerance in the Netherlands, public policies in regard to sex and gender politics, and the everyday experiences of sexual and gender minorities in the Netherlands, and the European Union.

This program will be led by Prof. Julia Grant, and has been developed with the support of James Madison College, the College of Arts and Letters, the Center for Gender in Global Context, and the Office of Study Abroad.

Twenty students will spend a month in Amsterdam in June and July of this year, and it’s intended that the program will run annually. Rumors are that the enrollment is filling fast, and it’s attracting interest from across the country. This will be an important and very welcome addition to MSU’s roster of LGBTQ-related academic opportunities.